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THE ORIGINAL FATHER JUNIPERO

(Legends from the "Flowers of St. Francis.")

BY F. J. POLLEY.

We know little of Father Serra prior to his work in the New World; yet he was then a man of mature years, with refined powers of mind and a character so firm of purpose and a plan of work so well considered that he seldom swerved from the ideals of his youth.

It becomes an interesting problem to trace the growth of this man's ideals, and, if possible, to ascertain who had an ascendancy over him, and what influences helped him to shape his life.

As time passes, I see more clearly that Father Serra was not of the eighteenth century, but of those before. I see that he was highly gifted in the spiritual sense, a devout churchman, one highly susceptible to the influence of his order, and an admirer of those in whose footsteps he forged to follow. But just here arises the question, Who were his ideals?

Naturally, the modern mind turns to St. Francis as the chief among those whose lives had influenced our priest. The literature of St. Francis and his times is abundant and accessible. This we are entitled to use, having due regard for critical canons in helping out the unknown history of Serra's formative years; but yet the fact remains we are lacking in the main details of Serra's growth.

That he had an ideal is well known. His assumption of the name "Junipero" perhaps may have been influenced by the current belief that nothing evil in animal life could live under the shade of the juniper tree; so Serra had hoped by his labors to route the Devil and like a juniper banish evil from the world.

Another mentions a certain Brother Juniper, a companion and follower of the Holy St. Francis, and a man whose life appealed so strongly to Serra that he assumed the name in connection with his own. Father Palou says:

"At an early age Junipero was well instructed by his parents in the rudiments of the Holy Catholic faith." Later he pursues his studies at the Convent of Jesu. I now quote Palou:

"During the year of his novitiate, Junipero studied carefully the austere rules of the Franciscans, and read the lives of many saints which that glorious order had given to the church; like another, Ignatius of Loyola. This reading inflamed his heart with love and zeal for souls. . . . The year of his probation being ended, Fr. Junipero was professed on the 15th of September, 1731. On account of his great devotion to one of the just confessions of St. Francis—Friar Juniper—he took that name in his profession. Such was his spiritual joy on that solemn day that each year he renewed his vows on the anniversary."

There is nothing scientifically accurate in thus retelling these vague surmises; nor is there in what follows, yet it is of this Friar Juniper I wish to speak. Such a man existed, and his life was undoubtedly known to Father Serra. Beyond this, it is merely a question of inference.

You will find no mention of this old saint in the general discussion of our local history, and yet, if we grant a grain of truth back of the reason assigned for Serra's name Junipero, he must have known and approved the main outlines of the life I now present. I trust I shall not be misunderstood as claiming either absolute truth for the old biography and collection of monkish legends that I have drawn upon, nor as stating it to be more than a reasonable hope that I may be correct when I make my suggestion that in this collection lay one of the inspirational sources of Serra's life.

Edward Everett Hale has published a paper on the probability of the name California having been borrowed from a romance widely known in that period of discovery, and hence in the minds of the men who first visited our coasts. The argument of Dr. Hale is equally useful in my present inquiry, and I adopt it in the main as applicable to my paper, i. e., a book existed telling of the life of a certain Brother Juniper, and our Serra had read and believed it all. Understand, then, that what follows is offered solely as a contribution towards the solution of an interesting point in our local annals and nothing more.

First, as to the prevalence of monkish legends of the past. You see from the quotation from Father Palou that Junipero Serra was deeply read therein. They constitute an important part of the early literature of the Romance nations. The collections were widely known and extensively copied, were read, discussed, used in sermons with a firm belief in their literal truth by the mass of the people, though modern criticism can now

detect the symbolic nature of parts that once passed for truth as sacred as lips could utter. I have spent days in the ancient libraries of Europe, and the charm of these old records, with their beautiful vellums and lovely lettering, grows greater as each opportunity arises to examine them. It is impossible to make one realize in California what tangible evidence these old manuscripts offer of the loving care bestowed upon them and how highly their contents were prized. Mr. Aldrich, in *Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book*, has done more than tell a legend; he has entered into the true spirit of the past. As printing arose, the *Golden Legend of Caxton*, with its lives of saints, at once testifies to the importance of these stories as material for books. Not to be tedious on a non-debatable subject, think of the vast later compilations known as *Butler's Lives of the Saints* and their present importance. You will find full legends of our Padre Juniper in a book entitled "*The Flowers of St. Francis*," and long used by the common people of Italy.

The earliest dated manuscript is 1390. The book is almost unknown to the Protestant people. It is accessible to the translators, by T. W. Arnold, printed by Dent & Co., of London.

In the Italian compilation known as the *Flowers of St. Francis*, the life of Padre Juniper is placed toward the latter part of the book.

As to the book from which I have drawn these legends, it is not my purpose to speak.

My paper is not critical, because the legends are not historically true as to facts; no one pretends they are, and my aim is simply to enforce this well-known fact to your minds that they were immensely popular in the centuries succeeding St. Francis' life and death. In the Italian our brother is known as Borthier Ginipero. It was the pun made by St. Francis that converted the name into Junipero, or the Juniper tree.

Mrs. Alithaut retells a few legends in her work on St. Francis, but Sabatier, in his great critical work on St. Francis, p. 415, et seq., goes so fully into the authorities for these Fioretti that nothing more need be said in this paper except to copy a couple of short extracts.

THE FIORETTI.

"With the Fioretti we enter definitely the domain of legend. This literary gem relates the life of Francis, his companions and disciples, as it appeared to the popular imagination at the beginning of the fourteenth century. We have not to discuss the lit-

erary value of this document, one of the most exquisite religious works of the Middle Ages, but it may be said that from the historic point of view it does not deserve the neglect to which it has been left.

"Yet that which gives those stories an inestimable worth is what, for want of a better term, we may call their atmosphere. They are legendary, worked over, exaggerated, false even, if you please, but they give us, with a vivacity and intensity of coloring, something that we shall search for in vain elsewhere—the surroundings in which St. Francis lived. More than any other biography, the Fioretti transport us to Umbria, to the mountains of the March of Ancon; they make us visit the hermitages, and mingle with the life, half childish, half angelic, which was that of their inhabitants.

"It is difficult to pronounce upon the name of the author. His work was only that of gathering the flowers of his bouquet from written and oral tradition. The question whether he wrote in Latin or Italian has been much discussed, and appears to be not yet settled; what is certain is that though this work may be anterior to the Conformities, it is a little later than the Chronicle of the Tribulations, for it would be strange that it made no mention of Angelo Clareno, if it was written after his death.

"The stories crowd one another in this book like flocks of memories that come upon us pell-mell, and in which insignificant details occupy a larger place than the most important events; our memory is, in fact, an overgrown child, and what it retains of a man is generally a feature, a word, a gesture.

"It is easy to understand the success of the Fioretti. The people fell in love with these stories, in which St. Francis and his companions appear both more human and more divine than other legends; and they began very soon to feel the need of so completing them as to form a veritable biography.

"The second, entitled *Life of Brother Ginepro*, is only indirectly connected with St. Francis; yet it deserves to be studied, for it offers the same kind of interest as the principal collection, to which it is doubtless posterior. In these fourteen chapters we find the principal features of the life of this Brother, whose mad and saintly freaks still furnish material for conversation in Umbrian monasteries. These unpretending pages discover to us one aspect of the Franciscan heart. The official historians have thought it their duty to keep silence upon this Brother, who, to them, appeared to be a supremely indiscreet personage, very much in the way of the good name of the Order in the eyes

of the laics. They were right from their point of view, but we owe a debt of gratitude to the Fioretti for having preserved for us this personality, so blithe, so modest, and with so arch a good nature. Certainly St. Francis was more like Ginipero than like Brother Elias or St. Bonaventura."—Sabatier, p. 415.

I have drawn from the book alluded to by Sabatier the following legends of this Brother Ginipero, making my abstract as brief as possible to economize time and space, though by so doing the literary flavor of the original is hopelessly lost to you. It certainly is "an exquisite religious work."

The narrative begins abruptly, as follows: "Brother Juniper was one of the most elect disciples and first companions of St. Francis, a man of deep humility, of great fervor and great charity, of whom St. Francis, speaking on a time with his holy companions, said: 'He would be a good Brother Minor who had conquered himself and the world like Brother Juniper.'"

This is all by way of prelude. The brother thus introduced is taken rapidly through a series of episodes in his life that illustrate his character.

In the first legend he is visiting a sick man, and, all on fire with love and compassion, he asked, "Can I do thee any service?" The sick man replied, "Much comfort would it give me if thou couldst get me a pig's trotter to eat."

Brother Junipero rushes to a forest, seizes a pig, severs its foot, prepares the morsel and presents it to the sick man. But while Brother Juniper, with "great glee for to glad the heart of the sick man," is telling him the tale of its capture, a different scene is being enacted: The owner who saw the mayhem of his pig, reports to his lord, and from thence hurries to the house of the brothers, whom he upbraids with a copious selection of choice epithets as hypocrites, thieves, liars, rogues, knaves, etc. St. Francis could not appease him, even though he offered the man restitution, for he leaves in a rage, telling his woes to all he meets upon the road.

St. Francis is shown as a student of human nature. He keeps counsel and wonders if Brother Juniper be not the culprit "in zeal too indiscreet," so, secretly calling, he asks him. The brother, glorying in the deed, details the facts, and thinks 100 pigs could be similarly sacrificed and yet he would say "well done." But St. Francis' level head, foreseeing the evil effect of the owner's wrath, gently reprimands Brother Juniper, who now goes forth charged to apologize until the man is pacified.

Juniper is unable to understand the nature of his wrong, "for

it seemed to him these temporal things were naught save so far as men of their charity shared them with their neighbors."

A doctrine certainly now objected to by the property owners and governing classes of our age and by those of the past as well.

The man heaps abuse upon our brother, who cannot understand why the owner should do so, for it seems to him a matter of rejoicing rather than wrath; but yet he rejoiced to be "ill spoken of."

Once again the incredulous brother retells his tale, and by tears and caresses so works up the irate fellow that he capitulates, and, conquered by the devotion and humility of Brother Juniper, kills his pig, cooks it and serves it to St. Francis at St. Mary of the Angels. The episode ends with the sentence that I think lodged in Father Serra's memory and influenced his life—"And St. Francis, pondering on the simplicity and the patience of said holy Brother Juniper, in the hour of trial, said to his companions and others standing around, "Would to God my brothers that I had a whole forest of such Junipers."

It is not my intention to give a full analysis of this valuable record, and I have given one chapter more in detail as a type of the rest than for any special interest attached to it beyond the closing sentence last quoted, and which is so pertinent to my theme.

Of the remaining chapters it must suffice for the limits of my paper to say that in each and every one Brother Juniper, out of many adventures, emerges more holy and beloved by all. I will now abstract a few narrations and anecdotes.

A man afflicted with demons had a rational moment, because, Juniper passing that way, the devils, by their own confession, could not endure his holiness, and fled until he passed. After this, when an afflicted man was brought him, St. Francis would say, "If thou come not out of this creature straight away, I will send for Brother Juniper to deal with thee." A most efficacious threat, and far more sure of a cure than all the medical science in our modern asylums, if we are to believe this little book.

The most detailed episode relates how this devil attempted revenge by assuming the guise of a peasant, and then in this form warning the tyrant Nicolas of a spy who will attempt his life. Says the wily devil: "He will come as a beggar, in garments torn and patched, his cowl hanging all tattered on his shoulder, and he will bring with him an aul wherewith to kill you, and a tinder box to set fire to your castle."

Here we have a true picture of Brother Juniper, who is now on his travels. Later he is assaulted by youths, noted by the guards, and dragged before Nicolas. He testifies that he carried the aul to mend his sandals; the tinder box was for his fire when he slept alone in the lonely woods on chill nights.

The examination begins with torture, but he courts it, and, entering into the spirit of the inquiry, and to increase the torture, says, "I am the worst of traitors," and as to killing and burning, "much worse things would I do if God permitted it."

Next we find him tied to the tail of a horse and dragged to the place of execution, happy in his persecution, and saying, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you," etc.

His voice is recognized amid the hooting crowd. A friend rushes to the tyrant, there is a stay of proceedings, an investigation, a pardon, an apology, and the tyrant does all in his power to make amends for having tortured a brother, and even though it appears he evidently wanted the persecution, yet for the torture administered the tyrant knows he has lost favor with God, "and God suffered it that a few days thereafter that tyrant, Nicolas, ended his days with a cruel death;" (and this, mind you, though Brother Juniper had at once before this event freely forgiven the tyrant) but the old chronicler must make his point, and men who interfere with brothers must be warned. Having made God cruel, all is ended. And Brother Juniper departed, leaving all the people edified."

And, if I may add to such a dramatic little recital, "and the modern reader much mystified"—at the morality of the entire tale.

Brother Juniper was so accustomed to giving even his robe and cowl to any one who chose to beg that his guardian forbade it.

Upon the next occasion, the brother repeats his guardian's orders to the beggar, but adds that while he may not give it, nor any part thereof, yet "if thou take it from my back, I will not say thee nay." He spoke not to the deaf, and Brother Juniper returned naked. When asked for details, he merely said, "A good man took it from my back and went away with it."

Such quibbling as this evidently was not considered deceitful or evasive of the truth, not to call it by the modern term of downright lying, and it is practiced today by many a witness who glibly repeats the solemn oath "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God," and then invariably holds back the "whole truth," and considers himself

clever just in proportion as he is able to baffle the opposing attorney who asks for it. It is a matter that can be relegated to Hamlet's class of "things more honored in the breach than in the observance," and we who live in glass houses ought to be tender with Brother Juniper, with his quibbles and white lies.

Our Brother Juniper seems to have had no conception of private ownership, giving away everything that came to his hands, or, more properly, what his hands came to, for he levied toll upon all until books, vestments and mantels were locked and guarded from him.

The altar especially rich in decorations had a zealous guardian, who took much pride in an altar piece fringed with gold and set with silver bells of great price. While at the table, a sudden fear of Brother Juniper, who was at solitary worship, caused him to rush suddenly from the table. He was too late; a woman had solicited alms, and the brother, meditatively saying, "These things are a superfluity, had cut them from the fringe and given them to the poor woman, "for pity's sake." What follows is a delightful picture of a monastic tempest. We have details of the sacristan's rage, his search throughout the city for the fringe, the formal complaint to the Father General, who severely alludes to the sacristan's stupidity, he well knowing Juniper's weakness, but he adds, "Nevertheless, I will correct him well for this fault."

Juniper is summoned, and the Father General is so lovingly true to his promise that eventually, from over-wrath, has to desist from hoarseness and inability to scold more. The brother, however, "cared little and well-nigh nothing for his words, for he took delight in insults whenever he was well abused, but in piety for the hoarseness of the General, he began to bethink him of a remedy." Juniper wishes to cure the throat, so that he can be cured at great length. Next we find the remedy in process—a pottage of flour and butter. It is well into the morning hours when Juniper knocks at the General's cell. They have another scene, the irate General calling him scoundrel and caitiff for disturbing him at that unseemly hour, for how can he eat in semi-darkness? At last Juniper, in the simplicity of his heart, proposes that the General hold the candle while he (the brother) consumes the pottage, "that it be not wasted." This breaks the General's wrath. He is reconciled, and together "they twain eat the pottage of flour, by reason of his unfortunate charity, and they were refreshed much more by devotion than by the food."

Devotional acts were not neglected, and another side of the

picture shows Juniper silent for six months—the first day for love of God, the next for the Son, for the Holy Spirit, for the Virgin, and then a saint for each succeeding day. Surely the list of saints did not give out, but presumably the brother's theory did, and he welcomed a change; else there might have been eternal silence and no more tales to chronicle. Once to abase himself, he made a bundle of his clothes and stood half naked the day in the market place of Niterbo. The description of the howling, taunting, mud-slinging, rock-casting mob is quite vivid, as is also the fierce rage of his brothers, when they heard of it. They said he was a madman and deserved jail and hanging for the disgrace and ill repute brought upon the convent. And "Brother Juniper, full of joy, replied in all humility, 'Well and truly have you spoken, for these punishments am I worthy, and of much more.'"

Upon another occasion, hearing of a festival to be held at Assisi, he stripped himself to his breeches, and so made the journey to its convent. These brothers were for hanging him, and when the General reproved him severely for the disgrace and ill repute he brought upon them, all, until he knew not what penance he could inflict, Juniper asked "That in the same manner as I came hither, so for penance' sake I should return to the place whence I started for to come to this festival."

Such an utterly silly and illogical request carries its own commentary; yet apparently his reputation for sanctity grew with each new episode.

When a friend and brother died, he wished to go to the grave, disinter the body, sever the head and from it make two porringers to use in his eating and drinking in memory of the deceased. Only his certain knowledge of the rage of his brothers at such an act prevented its accomplishment.

At his devotions he was wrapped in ecstasies. He saw a hand in mid air and heard a voice say, "O, Brother Juniper, without this hand thou canst do nothing;" and for days after he went about repeating in a loud voice, "'Tis true, indeed; 'tis true indeed."

One episode is partly comic, though the writer meant it as a glorious recital. It is long, and I brief it baldly.

Visiting a monastery, Juniper is asked to prepare food for the brothers' return. He plans to provide a week's rations at one cooking that more time may be had for prayer. He begs cooking pots, provisions and fuel and begins.

"Everything is thrown into the pots—flowls with their fea-

thers on and eggs in their shells, and all the rest in like fashion." The roaring fire burns him. He lashes a plank in front of his body, and thus warded, skips and jumps from pot to pot in a fever of earnestness. Brothers return, peep in and are lost in wonder. The summons comes for refreshment. Brother Juniper, all heated and flushed, serves his stew, and says, eat quickly that we may hasten to prayer. When the covers are lifted, the stew gives forth such a frightful odor that not a pig in the land of Rome could have eaten it.

The brothers rage over the waste of so much food, and the guardian rebukes him for stupidity. When the evil is done, Juniper begins to see the effects of his unthinking acts, and with tears and lamentations begs that his eyes be put out or that he be hung for the waste to the Order committed.

He hides for a day in shame. "Then, quoth the guardian, my brothers dear, if only we had it, I would that every day this brother spoiled as much as he hath today, if so we might be edified, for great simplicity and charity have made him do this thing."

Upon a journey to Rome, our brother displayed another trait. People crowded from Rome to welcome and escort him to the convent of the Brothers Minor, but he wished to turn their devotion to scorn, and so we are told that upon the road "There were two children playing at see-saw, to wit, they had put one log across another log and each sat at his own end and so went up and down." Brother Juniper, displacing one child, assumed its place upon the log. The people gather, salute and wait.

"And Brother Juniper paid little heed to their salutations, their reverence and their waiting for him, but took great pains with his see-sawing." Some thought him mad; others more devout than ever; but the crowd disperses and then Brother Juniper remained altogether comforted, because he had seen some folk that made a mock at him. So he went on his way and entered Rome with all meekness and humility, and came to the convent of the Brothers Minor."

And here, for the limitations of time, we must leave him, and even forbear critical comment upon the strange episodes enumerated. In this brief summary no attempt has been made to reproduce the genuine charm of the child-like narrative.

As a guide for modern life, it may lapse into obscurity, but as a naive, unconscious picture of the past, it is worth more than a half contemptuous glance.

Absurd as many of the acts enumerated are now, they were the acts of so-called holy men, and the authors who wrote, and the people who read, saw only the deeds of saintly persons, fit to be held up for profitable imitation.

If we lose sight of the fact that such recitals formed the basis and guide for preaching and practical living, and consider them merely as literature, we miss the key that unlocks the inner meaning of a past religious life, just as surely as will the future historian misunderstand our age who one day writes of the nineteenth century Bible, considered purely as literature and not as the religious guide of the century under his critical discussion.

The vital question is not how we judge the tales, but how Father Serra did. The problem of his life, to us, in the present inquiry, lies in the sources from which he drew his inspiration. He lived according to his light, for he was not great enough like Wiclif to be a beacon for a waiting world. Father Serra was no "morning star of a Reformation." He was a disciple, not a creator—spiritual within his narrow credulities, but not an originator of his ideals. Through life until death he was zealous for the interests intrusted to him, and within the lines of his trust he brought such worthy characteristics into action that he was then and now a man among men in the history of the West.

Yet in all this any sincere admirer of Serra sees his limitations, and reasoning from the causes of early piety and inspirations, can trace the effects of a highly developed belief in miracles and special providences that are to be opportunely furnished when unreasoning zeal had rendered a natural solution of difficulties incurred almost an impossibility. The man with a call on miracles does not have to look before he leaps, and the doctrine and its effects are often serious for the world.

This book of tales must have proved a great comfort to one of Serra's temperament. He could read of men wholly devoted to their order—over-zealous, meek beyond reason; almost senseless in the extreme to which their emotional instincts led them—seeking martyrdom, assuming burdens, mocked at and generally themselves inviting the occasion for trouble, yet, all in all, triumphing in each and every case of wild folly of conduct; revered by high and low, and at their death received among the saints by miracles so taxing nature that the episodes of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection seem to pale beside the reversal of natural laws called out to do honor to these dead.

This, however, is dead issue with us, but when, in studying

the development of our land and noting the part played by its developers, the source of their seemingly strange beliefs often becomes of interest; thus the acquisition of such a little guide book and text of practical works as the one I have briefed for the society, assumes an importance long lost to it, and this one sentence in it deserves enrollment among the chance sayings that have helped make history: "Would to God, my brothers, that I had a whole forest of such Junipers."